



**NO A LAS PAPELERAS:
Environmentalism,
Nationalism and Distrust
in Argentina**

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During my semester spent studying in Argentina in the spring of 2007, *porteños*, as residents of Buenos Aires refer to themselves, were repeatedly described to me as not having a particularly strong environmental consciousness. They do not recycle, supermarket chains do not carry organic products, and no one seems to pay much mind to the fact that the Río de la Plata, the river running adjacent to their city, is a constant shade of grayish-brown. If nobody cares about the environment, I thought, then how is it that the slogan of a small Argentine city's local community environmental group ended up on the side of a hot dog vendor's cart I came across on the streets of Buenos Aires? I, being a foreigner, did not realize what the slogan, "*No a las papeleras, sí a la vida*," (no to the paper plants, yes to life) was referring to at the time that I noticed it on the cart. Argentines, on the other hand, had heard it a million times by then, because the conflict surrounding the *papeleras* had been consistently receiving prominent coverage by major newspapers for nearly five years. For the first time in Argentina's history, an environmental issue had gained the kind of widespread attention that not only made it omnipresent in media coverage but motivated an urban hot dog vendor, a profile not associated with the typical environmentalist (especially in Latin America), to express his concern for the environment.

The conflict surrounds the construction of two paper pulp mills in the city of Fray Bentos, Uruguay on the banks of the Uruguay River, which runs along the

border between Argentina and Uruguay. The 2002 announcement by then Uruguayan president Jorge Batlle that he would permit the Spanish company Ence to build a pulp mill in Fray Bentos (Aboud and Museri 2007) did not initially spark a reaction in Argentina. As of early 2008, however, the issue of the paper mills had caused relations between the Argentine and Uruguayan governments to become strained to the point of being nearly severed, countless massive demonstrations have taken place, and there is no simple solution in sight. How did an environmental issue, which had never before garnered a level of attention even remotely close to the *papeleras*, transform into such a controversy and create such a rift between two countries who had always maintained good relations?

The reason is what this essay will explore. Through an analysis of the ways in which various groups involved in the conflict framed the issue of the *papeleras*, it is possible to trace the roots of Argentina's reaction and understand its character. Specifically, I will examine how the movement surrounding the *papeleras* conflict reflects and connects to classic Argentine social movement frames while at the same time demands the production and incorporation of new frames. I break up the frames into two main categories: the "nationalist" frame, which broadly conceives the problem as an affront to Argentina's territorial sovereignty, placing the "blame" on the Uruguayan government; and the "environmentalist" frame, which considers the problem in terms of the plants' possible polluting of the river, blaming the Argentine and Uruguayan national governments as well as the role of multinational corporations in Latin America. I will also consider the cultural and political context, which has intensified the pertinence of these frames and explore how this motivated

the national government to become involved on an unprecedented level. On the basis of this analysis, I will argue that although the attention that has been given to the conflict signifies an overall increase in consciousness of and concern for the environment on the part of both the general public and the national government, the way it has been framed has limited the consideration of environmental issues to a relationship between clearly defined “victims” and “victimizers,” making it unclear whether this newfound consciousness will permit the reflection on both the external and internal sources of these issues that is necessary to combat more amorphous issues like global warming.

Social Movement Perspectives

From an outsider’s perspective, the development of the conflict comes across as a story full of characters that are uncompromising to the point of being self-destructive. Their staunchness, as misguided as it may appear, has clear sources that make the conflict’s tumultuous history more understandable. Uncovering these sources, however, proves a difficult process, because the conflict over the *papeleras* was played out in the local media: barely covered by international news organizations, thorough coverage was limited to local news. The first comprehensive academic study of the conflict was published in September 2007, a collection of essays titled *Del otro lado del río* (From the Other Side of the River), compiled by two Argentines. Depending for the most part exclusively on sources colored by the perspectives that I am looking to deconstruct has its drawbacks, making the process

of culling objective information surrounding specific events especially difficult, but in the end, the range of biases I encountered turned out to be a fascinating and invaluable resource, made manageable by utilizing aspects of social movement theory.

I focus on the concept of “frame alignment processes”: “By rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective” (Snow, Burke Rochford et al. 1997). Scholars generally agree on the fundamental definitions of frame alignment processes. Doug McAdam defines them as “the efforts by which organizers seek to join the cognitive orientations of individuals with those of social movement organizations.” (McAdam 1997). The organizers’ task is to construct a “view of the world that both legitimates and motivates protest activity” (McAdam 1997). The success of these efforts is partly determined by the “cultural resonance of the frames advanced by organizers”. Framing efforts can then be considered “acts of cultural appropriation, with movement leaders seeking to tap highly resonant ideational strains in mainstream society (or in a particular target subculture) as a way of galvanizing activism” (McAdam 1997).

The tasks of the movement analyst include accounting “for the structural factors that have objectively strengthened the challenger’s hand, and analyzing the processes by which the meaning and attributed significance of shifting political conditions is assessed,” which he calls “expanding cultural opportunities” (McAdam 1997). Central to these tasks are the “highly resonant ideational strains” described by McAdam, which David A. Snow identify as “master frames” (Snow, Burke

Rochford et al. 1997) and which Rita K. Noonan defines as “larger cultural frames that ‘provide the interpretive medium through which collective actors associated with different movements...assign blame for the problem they are attempting to ameliorate’ (Noonan 1997).

There are two identifiable master frames through which the range of responses to *las papeleras* can be analyzed and understood: reactions to the conflict can be categorized as either pertaining to the “nationalist” frame, which, as explained previously, broadly conceives the problem as an affront to Argentina’s territorial sovereignty, placing the “blame” on the Uruguayan government, or the “environmentalist” frame, which considers the problem in terms of the plants’ possible polluting of the river, blaming both Uruguay and the role of multinational corporations in Latin America. As Noonan explains, however, frames are not static: “Collective action frames within a ‘cycle’ can compete with each other...The rise and fall of master frames may shape how movement-specific frames compete, decay, and transform, as some master frames create space for certain ideas while others do not” (Noonan 1997). In this case, nationalist and environmentalist discourse are not mutually exclusive. Nationalism and environmentalism function in tandem with one another, and by the end of the conflict, become inseparable to the point where Vicente Palermo in “*Papeleras: sacando las castañas del fuego*, (*Papeleras: Getting the job done*)” speaks of the single frame of “environmental nationalism” (Palermo 2007).

The interplay between the nationalist and environmentalist master frames can be understood through Snow’s identification of four main types of frame alignment

processes: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation (Snow, Burke Rochford et al. 1997). Frame bridging, “the linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem” (Snow, Burke Rochford et al. 1997), is a particularly important tool for the nationalist frame. The concept of frame extension—how social movement organizations “frequently promote programs or causes in terms of values and beliefs that may not be especially salient or readily apparent to potential constituents and supporters, thus necessitating the amplification of these ideational elements in order to clarify the linkage between personal or group interests and support for the SMO [Social Movement Organization]” (Noonan 1997)—is especially helpful in understanding how groups utilize multiple frames to mobilize individuals towards collective action. This tactic was used within the context of the environmentalist frame.

Analysis of the *papeleras* conflict through the concepts of frame alignment processes provides an important entry into the deeper issues involved in the conflict, but in order to account for the overarching political context in which these frames flourished, it is fitting to go back to a theory that frame theorists regard as incomplete: the political process model. In one of the first books on the subject, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, Doug McAdam recognizes three sets of factors which the model identifies as crucial in the generation of social insurgency: first, “the level of organization within the aggrieved population; second, the collective assessment of the prospects for successful insurgency within that same population; and third, the political alignment of groups

within the larger political environment”, also called the “structure of political opportunities” (McAdam 1982) available to insurgent groups. In the context of the *papeleras*, the third set of factors is most relevant, which looks at how shifts in political opportunities can restructure power relations, and how these shifts demanded, and gave way to, specific frames.

Another important question to consider is the relationship between framing choices, political context, and what Charles Tilly terms “repertoires of contention” (Tilly 1995), which describes the way that a “prior history of contention strongly constrains the choices of action currently available, in partial independence of the identities and interests that participants bring to the action” (p. 29). For the environmentalists involved in the conflict, prior histories of contention had a major influence on their choices of strategy and tactics.

Papeleras: 2002-2008

In order to fully comprehend the significance of the framing of the *papeleras*, it is necessary to discuss the events that produced and shaped them. The history that follows demonstrates the transformation of a localized, essentially “NIMBY” issue, into a geopolitical crisis.

Del otro lado del río, the premier study on the subject, begins with a thorough, albeit Argentina-centric, play-by-play of the conflict. In their essay “*En caída libre. Del diferendo al conflicto*” (Free fall: From the disagreement to the conflict), Lucía Aboud and Anabella Museri trace its development in exhaustive detail. They explain

that initial opposition to the plants stemmed from preexisting Uruguayan environmental groups who had formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in response to the forestation policy enacted by the Uruguayan government in 1987 (Aboud and Museri 2007). This policy promoted the planting of vast areas of rural Uruguay with trees meant for paper production in an effort to attract foreign investment to areas other than Montevideo and the coast, the main tourist areas (Alvarado 2006). These groups were the first to express concern about the possible pollution that would be produced by the plants, and after seeing no impact in Uruguay, looked to the residents of the city of Gualeguaychú, directly across the river in Argentina, for support.

It was this effort on the part of Uruguayan environmentalists that “jumpstarted a local environmental movement on the Argentine shore and shaped a social movement that organized itself quickly and efficiently” (Aboud and Museri 2007), a phenomenon which Carlos Reboratti refers to as “spontaneous environmentalism” (Reboratti 2006). Residents of Gualeguaychú raised their concerns to the Administrative Commission of the River Uruguay (CARU for its initials in Spanish), a bilateral organization in which both countries are equally represented. Created by the Statute of the River Uruguay in 1975, the CARU elaborated the duties and obligations of each state concerning their shared natural resource and was intended to serve as a mediation mechanism for conflicts surrounding the river, specifically concerning “the conservation and preservation of the natural resources, and the prevention of pollution” in the river (Vernet 2006).

Dissatisfied by the CARU's response, the group that would come to be known as the Citizens' Environmental Assembly of Gualeguaychú (ACAG for its initials in Spanish) came together and organized a series of protests in July 2003. In October, the group blocked traffic across the international General San Martín Bridge, which connects Gualeguaychú, Argentina with Fray Bentos, Uruguay, for the first time. This approach would become their most powerful tactic, the significance of which I discuss further on. It is important to note that from the beginning, the ACAG was the main proponent of the environmentalist frame and maintained a fierce opposition to the plants, considering their potential for pollution as a given. They also received government support from the start, beginning with the mayor of Gualeguaychú, and eventually from the provincial and national governments as well.

Later that month, the Uruguayan government confirmed that the Spanish company Ence would construct a plant in Fray Bentos, and announced that it was negotiating with the Finnish company Botnia to construct a second, much larger plant only a few kilometers away from the first. This attracted attention from Argentine president Nestor Kirchner, who initiated discussion with Uruguay in the CARU. The authors write that it was "clear that initially both governments were disposed towards reaching an agreement although they would not settle on formal stipulations, and that they assumed their initiatives would calm or dilute local unrest" (Aboud and Museri 2007). Neither side had adopted the nationalist frame that each eventually would develop. The ACAG were very dissatisfied with what they perceived to be the Argentine federal government's "lenient and negligent attitude" (Aboud and Museri 2007) and increased the pressure on both national governments by

blockading the General San Martín Bridge more frequently, paradoxically pushing for both sides to cooperate and stop the plants while simultaneously encouraging Argentine hostility towards Uruguay.

The year 2005 brought the conflict out of what Vicente Palermo calls an “encapsulated-technocratic” period to a “participative-politicized” (Palermo 2007) one. Small, “encapsulated” demonstrations and reliance on institutionalized, “technocratic” arenas for solving the conflict gave way to widespread protest and vigorous efforts to transform it into a cornerstone of Argentina’s political agenda.

In February, then Uruguayan president Batlle’s government authorized Botnia’s plant, and as Tabaré Vasquez took over the presidency in March, the issue became central to the new president’s discourse (although before his election his party had opposed the project), citing its importance as the largest investment in Uruguay’s history. This motivated the first large demonstration against the plants, in which 40,000 people, mostly Argentines and some Uruguayans, took over the General San Martín Bridge. This event radicalized the provincial government of Entre Ríos, in which Gualeguaychú is located, and motivated the national government of Argentina to change its position and demand that Uruguay produce an environmental impact study within the 180 days stipulated in the Statute of the River Uruguay. The media played a large role in politicizing the issue, and “made itself into a channel through which protagonists’ voices could be heard...significantly augmenting the public impact of the conflict and making it nationally and internationally relevant” (Aboud and Museri 2007). Because the public’s initial encounter with the conflict was filtered through this lens, the ACAG was able to

define the conflict to the public in their terms, giving them significant leverage with the government.

The Argentine and Uruguayan governments continued to pursue institutional channels through which to resolve the conflict, forming a group in May 2005 consisting of experts from both sides to conduct the environmental impact study. The ACAG saw this agreement as an attempt to demobilize and debilitate them. In June, the provincial government requested that the International Finance Corporation (IFC), an arm of the World Bank which had proposed 400 million dollars in financing for the plants, conduct the study, and that the financing of the plants depend on the results, which it agreed to. In response, Uruguay stopped attending the meetings of the mixed commission. As bilateral institutions continued to fail, the Argentine government began to publicly express its support for the ACAG and their blockades, and to refer to the issue as a “national cause” (Aboud and Museri 2007). Uruguay also widened the scope of the issue by referring to the construction of the plants as a “cause of sovereignty” (Aboud and Museri 2007), which expanded the conflict beyond the environmental, and initiated the development of the nationalist frame.

Aboud and Museri mark this point as when

what had started as an environmental issue, without a doubt, transformed into a geopolitical conflict involving multiple actors who, taking on a variety of forms and utilizing different methods, represented business interests, spontaneous social concerns, political calculations, and methodologies managed by the government...at that time, there was no room for subtleties in the involved parties' perceptions and repertoires of action, and dissident voices (which surely existed) were conspicuous by their absence. In this context the conflict took on previously unknown characteristics, due as much to its public impact as the network of actors and their repertoires of action, which seemed to bring it to a dead end. (p. 27)

Not able to come to an agreement and holding fast to their original claims about pollution, Argentine and Uruguayan members of the environmental impact

commission produced separate and conflicting reports on environmental impact, which they distributed in January 2006. After official bilateral channels to solve the conflict had been exhausted, Argentina and Uruguay proceeded to attempt to undermine each other in various ways, further breaking down communication.¹

In April 2006, the IFC announced the results of its environmental impact study. The results did not endorse any of Argentina's assertions about pollution, which incited the ACAG as well as the provincial and national governments to increase confrontational action against Uruguay. Later that month, Uruguay officially cut off direct negotiation between its president and Argentina in relation to the *papeleras*, and both sides sought third parties to intervene. Argentina decided to take its case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), while Uruguay took its case to the Mercosur tribunal.²

In May 2006, Argentina's case before the ICJ focused on what they considered to be Uruguay's violation of the Statute of the River Uruguay by not consulting the CARU before approving construction of the plants, and possible irreparable damage to the river. Argentina requested that Uruguay be required to halt construction until the suit was over.³ In their presentation to the court, Uruguay responded to these accusations by claiming that Uruguay had complied with the

¹The provincial government of Entre Ríos denounced Uruguay in a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights; in a presentation to the IFC they requested that the ombudswoman of the World Bank become involved in the environmental impact study, which they called biased; and Jorge Busti, the governor of the province, threatened to cut off the plants' gas lines. In response to the governor's comments, Vazquez summoned his ambassador in Argentina, an unprecedented move between the two countries, and Kirchner did the same with his ambassador in Uruguay. In December 2005, Argentine customs blocked key construction parts destined for the plants from being exported to Uruguay.

² Mercosur (Southern Common Market) is a regional trade agreement between Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, founded in 1991 to promote free trade and the fluid movement of goods, peoples and currency. Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru have associate member status.

³ Such an order would equal an economic collapse for Uruguay because the decision from the ICJ could take years, Uruguay would be forced to pay indemnities to Botnia, and other countries would be dissuaded from investing in Uruguay in the future.

Statute because approval of the plants did not require Argentina's consent and that the plants posed no risk of pollution.

On July 13, 2006, the ICJ announced their decision, voting 14 to 1 in favor of Uruguay⁴, completely rejecting Argentina's argument about irreparable damage to the river, adding that although the plants may produce pollution, "that the threat of any pollution is not imminent as the mills are not expected to be operational before August 2007 and June 2008" (Vernet 2006). In her article on the case, Paula María Vernet points out that although pollution was not "imminent" because the plants were not yet functioning, it was a given:

the choice of the site for the mills is a very important part in the case. It must be borne in mind that Orion [the Botnia plant] is one of the biggest mills in the world, and that its production will be, when the process is in full swing, about one million tons a year. Plants that size are not to be located on a river, but on the seashore, as seems to be the case with most—if not all—similar-sized plants elsewhere...paper production of this magnitude seems to be bound to cause some level of pollution. (p. 208)

At the end of its report the ICJ includes a statement encouraging "both Parties to refrain from any actions, which might render more difficult the resolution of the present dispute." (p. 206) Given that the disagreement had evolved into a struggle over sovereignty, and invoked notions of national identity, this is not what happened.

The Argentine national government did not consider the judgment to be a complete failure, and celebrated the ICJ's stipulation that Uruguay be obliged to take rigorous care of the environment. However, when Uruguay attempted to reopen dialogue, Argentina refused. The day after the release of the report, the ACAG, outraged that the national government would settle for anything but the removal of

⁴ The only dissenting vote was made by an Argentine.

the plants, staged a protest in which it announced that it would reject any future opportunity to meet with the national government to discuss strategy.

Conditions only worsened in August, when Uruguay brought its case to the Mercosur tribunal. It claimed that Argentina violated its right to free transit by not intervening to stop the blockades staged by the ACAG. In their defense, Argentina “emphasized the primacy of free speech over the right to free movement of goods” (Aboud and Museri 2007), reaffirming their commitment to the ACAG’s beliefs and tactics. In September, the tribunal voted unanimously in favor of Uruguay, but denied its request that Mercosur force Argentina to take measures to stop the blockades. Both governments interpreted the tribunal’s conclusions as a triumph.

In October, 2006, the new environmental impact statement as requested by the World Bank was released and stated that the plants would not harm the river, therefore confirming that Botnia and Ence would receive credits from the IFC. This did not help to open channels for dialogue when Uruguayan and Argentine representatives traveled to Spain in April to meet with a mediator. During the March 2007 meeting, both sides expressed their willingness to keep dialogue open, but maintained their positions intact throughout. The King of Spain attempted to mediate a dialogue between President Kirchner and President Vazquez at the Ibero-American summit in November 2007, which failed for the same reasons, and resulted in Vazquez authorizing the plant to begin production immediately after the meeting. Argentina protested, and Vazquez reiterated that it was Uruguay’s sovereign right to make that decision.

The future of the conflict is uncertain, as both sides have remained steadfast in their positions and show no sign of coming to an agreement any time soon. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, wife of Nestor Kirchner, was elected president in October 2007 and took office in December. It is still unclear if she will take a different approach from her husband. In her inauguration speech she promised not to make “a single gesture that would deepen the differences,” which she immediately followed by walking up to Vazquez and criticizing him for having “caused the crisis” (Bruschtein 2007). As this paper was being written in February 2008, the Argentine government had officially expressed its intention to restore “brotherhood” between the two countries (La Nación 2007), but remains steadfast in its claim that Uruguay did not have the right to approve the plants without its consent and that the ACAG’s claims are “legitimate” (Página/12 2008). The national government’s stance has acquired a dual nature, at times adopting a sympathetic tone when discussing Uruguay, but always immediately countering favorable statements by reiterating their commitment to the ACAG and their ICJ case against Uruguay, which has still not been resolved. The question of why the government would continue to support the ACAG, despite rebuke by several multinational bodies and putting its relationship with Uruguay at risk, is a complicated one that goes far beyond the question of environmental damage, and speaks to the complexity of both the nationalist and environmentalist frames.

In order to fully understand the conflict that has become a crisis, it is necessary to trace its beginnings as located within all sources of Argentine identity and its context: from its first incarnation as a Spanish colony, to its location within the

Latin American context (of both social movements and environmentalism), to its political and cultural history, to the economic crisis of 2001, which has defined Argentine social and political conditions for the past six years.

Contemporary Argentine Protest and the Culture of Distrust

The transition of the conflict from an “encapsulated-technocratic” period to a “participative-politicized” one has two roots, one practical, and one that is more subtle. The practical reason is that once the national government got involved and initiated discussion with Uruguay in the CARU, the *papeleras* became an international issue and therefore drew attention from the media and the public. The more nuanced reason plays into what I call the “culture of distrust,” which describes a generalized feeling among Argentines that politicians are not to be trusted, but that “spontaneous” social movements are. The public’s initial exposure to the conflict by way of the media’s focus on the voices of members of the ACAG immediately framed it as a struggle between a local community group and powerful politicians, therefore eliciting trust and support from the general public. However, the media was not the only factor, nor most important contributor to the creation of this image of the ACAG. In order to evoke this “culture,” the ACAG deliberately linked itself to Argentina’s recent history of protest, by acknowledging past social movement frames and repertoires of contention.

The roots of the “culture of distrust” are intimately tied up with Argentina’s recent history of protest. In “Protest and Politics in Contemporary Argentina”, Javier

Auyero describes how recent protest action in Argentina has shaped the contemporary political climate, focusing on events from the mid 1990s through 2001, a decade that “witnessed the emergence of new and unconventional forms of popular contention and collective violence in Argentina” (Auyero 2005). This description is consonant with what was taking place across the board during this period, throughout Latin America:

The macro political and economic changes of the 1990s...stirred new movements policy makers had not intended and often did not want. Whatever the logic of the economic restructuring, the deepening of the reform process eliminated jobs, generated new inequities, and, in most countries, also reduced income opportunities for the urban and rural poor. Reforms also made the populace more vulnerable to market vicissitudes. The new conditions generated new grievances, among new categories of people, and, in turn, new collective efforts for change. (Eckstein 2001)

The events discussed by Auyero are important to analyze in the context of the *papeleras*, because they explain how it fits into the greater Latin American, and specifically Argentine, social movement context: they are “crucial events in the current cycle of protest in the country, main examples of the resistance to the implementation and outcomes of neoliberal adjustment programs, key cases that illustrate a changing repertoire of contention, [and] episodes that encapsulate the emerging modalities and meanings of protest” (p. 252).

In Argentina, the phenomenon described by both Eckstein and Auyero was expressed in the sweeping economic changes made by Carlos Menem, president from 1989 through 1999. These included pegging the Argentine peso to the U.S. dollar, privatizing utilities, and encouraging a massive influx of foreign direct investment in an effort to combat inflation. The economy improved, but at the cost of high rates of unemployment. His policies also proved to be unsustainable as the

value of the dollar rose and Argentina's external debt increased, and despite intervention by the International Monetary Fund, the policy had to be abandoned and the economy fell into crisis.

In 1996, the "new inequities" described by Eckstein as a result of unemployment, prompted thousands of residents of two oil towns in the southern province of Neuquén to block all access roads into the area,

effectively halting the movement of people and goods for seven days and six nights. *Los piqueteros*, as the protesters in the barricades named themselves, demanded, 'genuine sources of employment,' rejected the intervention of their elected representatives and other local politicians (accusing them of dishonesty and of conducting 'obscure dealings'), and demanded to speak to the governor in person. (Auyero 2005)

As Tilly writes, "durable innovations generally grow out of success, as other actors rapidly borrow, then institutionalize, a new form of action that visibly advances its users' claims." (Tilly 1995). Because the *piqueteros*, as the people who utilized the technique came to be called, were successful, their tactic became part of Argentina's repertoire of contention. There are clear similarities between the road-blocking techniques used by the *piqueteros* and the bridge blockades of the ACAG, so much so, that Palermo chooses to call them "*neopiqueteros*" (Palermo 2007). Interestingly however, the ACAG denies this link:

the Assembly has always emphasized that in no way can the two groups be compared. This is fundamentally due to the social background of the Assembly's members, who come from sectors of the local middle class...The members of the ACAG have no intention of being compared to, nor assimilated with, a social movement formed by working class, unemployed people. (Reboratti 2007)

The other clear relation between the *piqueteros* and the *neopiqueteros* is the strong role played by distrust and skepticism in both cases. Because Argentines exist in a "framework of a crisis of representation and a basic distrust of politics and politicians" (Palermo 2007), distrust was a major part of the framing process used by

the ACAG to get their voices heard, win the public's favor, and effect political change. One can clearly understand the roots of this climate, as it seems to be a logical effect of living through the Dirty War. However, distrust takes on new meanings in a non-authoritarian, democratic context that are necessary to understanding the complex relationship that protesters had with the government throughout this conflict, which are made clear in the events that followed the freezing of bank accounts that took place in December 2001:

Close to three hundred stores were attacked or looted in eleven provinces during the week of December 14 to 21, 2001. Approximately twenty people died, all of them under thirty-five, killed either by the police or by store owners... The provinces of Entre Ríos and Mendoza were the first to witness hundreds of persons blockading roads and gathering in front of supermarkets demanding food and, when refused, entering the stores and taking away the merchandise... After a week of looting, thousands of hungry, desperate, and exhausted people gathered in front of municipal buildings in the north, center, and south of the country to demand food from those they blamed for its absence—officials and politicians. (Auyero 2005)

As a result of the riots, President Fernando de la Rúa was forced to resign on December 21. According to Palermo, not much has changed since then that would serve to win back the public's trust, because it initiated a "profound crisis of representation that affects Argentine politics on a global level (emblematically expressed during the well known protests of 2001-2002 and in the slogan '*que se vayan todos*' (out with them all))" (Palermo 2007). These images are particularly salient for Gualeguaychú residents, as their province of Entre Ríos was a birthplace of the riots that soon swept the country.

The exact role played by distrust is disputed amongst scholars of the conflict. Carlos Escudé, in "*El conflicto de las papeleras y la muerte de la política exterior*" (The *Papeleras* Conflict and the Death of Foreign Policy) describes the "latent but permanent crisis of governability" (Escudé 2006) that resulted from the economic

crisis of 2001 and has affected Argentina's domestic and foreign policy in relation to the *papeleras* conflict. Because of this "crisis of governability," Escudé believes that politicians have come to fear a "civil coup," the name he gives to the popular protests that ousted several presidents in a matter of weeks following the crisis. As a result, he argues, leaders have become completely subject to the whim of the masses.

There are a number of factors that contribute to this phenomenon, the most important of which are the "power of veto that was exercised by the military between 1930 and 1983", but which has since been inherited by "popular organizations," including environmentalists, and a dramatic rise in unemployment and poverty that has contributed to the rise of these organizations.

If the government were to try and suppress any uprisings, he writes, then "the next day the government would find that half of the protesters in the country would have won the streets in protest against official authoritarianism," producing further instability. In order to prevent this from occurring, Kirchner has "permitted the environmentalists to usurp a dimension of Argentine foreign policy, producing a disruption in the commerce of the Southern Cone." Escudé is critical of how Kirchner has handled the conflict, saying "the state has conferred a legal character to the violation of its own laws which has calmed the protests but has sharpened the deterioration of its institutions." This reflects Tilly's concept of how "all parties to the action, including authorities and objects of claims, adapt to the new presence" (Tilly 1995) of successful, innovative methods of collective action. However, he sees this process as not only the fault of the government but of a rise in poverty as well. He is

almost resigned to its inevitability: “a country that suffers from a latent but permanent crisis of governability,” he writes, “cannot have a foreign policy.”

Reconsidering the timeline of the development of the *papeleras* conflict, it is clear that Escudé’s concept of a “civil coup” had a significant influence on the national government’s behavior, and affected the way it conducted foreign policy. Despite repeated denial of its claims by several international bodies, the Argentine government continued to speak out for the interests of the ACAG and jeopardize its relationship with Uruguay. His argument that a rise in poverty contributed to an increase in power on the part of “popular organizations,” including environmental groups, does not work perfectly in the ACAG’s case. The forced resignation of five presidents in three weeks following the December 2001 riots demonstrated that people who had become impoverished as a result of the crisis had gained an enormous amount of power. Although the ACAG benefited from it, they deny any connection to it, which necessitates a discussion of distrust that is specific to the middle class.

Palermo provides that alternate view. Unlike Escudé, he sees Kirchner’s actions as an effort to appeal to middle-class public opinion, and far from being inevitable, that he made a conscious choice while other options existed:

One could say that Kirchner, as in other areas, acted more as a follower than a leader in relation to the moods and preferences of public opinion, especially pertaining to the middle class. The president’s cognitive map places a great deal of importance on gaining or conserving political capital coming from that sector, independent of the costs that it implies for foreign policy. (Palermo 2007)

To Palermo, his actions are understandable, but were not unavoidable, and stem from his incapacity as a leader: “Betting on ‘hyper-representativity’ in a framework of a crisis of representation and a basic distrust of politics and politicians is an option

and a choice, and demonstrates anything but a capacity for leadership” (p. 212). He also points out that the reactions of the national and provincial governments only “added fuel to the fire, increasing distrust,” and did nothing to quell protests as Escudé assumes.

The juxtaposition of these two perspectives demonstrates the complexity and somewhat contradictory nature of the culture of distrust: as Palermo notes, and as the timeline clearly shows, the ACAG grew increasingly frustrated with the government as it attempted to fulfill the group’s demands. The action that was meant to demonstrate the government’s commitment to the group was interpreted as an attempt to debilitate it, having the opposite effect of further entrenching distrust.

Arriving at an Argentine Environmental Consciousness

Although they have never attracted the level of attention that the *papeleras* has, Argentina does have a history of engagement with environmental issues. A review of a few of the most important events shows a history that is characterized by distrust. This history directly influenced the development of the conflict by laying the foundation for the limited framework in which both the general population and the government would consider environmental issues.

In “Environmentalism and the Environmental Conflict in the River Uruguay”, Carlos Reboratti claims that before 2006, the environment was far from being a

central concern to anyone in Argentina.⁵ However, “while this is common in underdeveloped countries, in Argentina’s case it is contradictory because, unlike many of these countries, Argentina has had an important urban middle class for a long time, and it is in precisely this sector of the population that in other countries environmental ideas have taken root” (Reboratti 2007). This attitude is consistent with the rest of Latin America, where the common view of environmentalism is that it is “elitist in structure and participant base” (Christen, Herculano et al. 1998), and where, “as with most developing areas, concern about employment, infrastructure, services, and political repression takes precedence over environmental activism... In some circles overt hostility toward conservation exists” (Price 1994). Often, environmentalism can even be considered harmful: “Seen in terms of Latin American class politics, environmental conservation has been viewed as an upper-class amenity that sometimes blocks resources from lower-income groups” (Christen, Herculano et al. 1998).

Reboratti divides Argentine environmentalism into three groups: state, institutionalized, and spontaneous. In his section on state environmentalism, he demonstrates that environmental politics have always been fraught with distrust. In the early 1970s, the state created a Secretary of the Environment position, who was active until the military coup in 1976. Concerns about the environment were not brought up again until the neoliberal government of Carlos Menem reestablished the post in the early nineties, “in consonance with his very publicized position as ‘the first

⁵ Ironically, in the 2005 Environmental Sustainability Index report produced by the World Economic Forum, which ranks nations on their success at such tasks as maintaining or improving air and water quality, maximizing biodiversity and cooperating with other countries on environmental problems, Argentina placed in the top ten, and Uruguay and Finland in the top three. The United States was ranked 45th. (Barringer 2005)

environmentalist president” (Reboratti 2007). However, in reactivating the post, Menem was considering the environment’s economic utility as opposed to its preservation or regulation. The subsequent imprisonment and prosecution for embezzlement of the Secretary of the Environment caused environmental issues to become associated with “futility, frivolity and corruption. With this public image in mind, future governments practically ‘hid’ the Secretary of the Environment within the Department of Health, removing all capability for concrete action” (Reboratti 2007)⁶. Reboratti is similarly critical of what he terms institutional environmentalism, which consists of established environmental NGOs. These groups generally avoided the *papeleras* conflict, by not taking a stance at all or taking an alternate stance to the ACAG by expressing their willingness to negotiate with Uruguay. Greenpeace started out as the exception, but Reboratti criticizes their tactics, finding fault with their tendency to focus on short campaigns “whose duration is almost never related with the resolution of the specific problem but with the objectives of the organization” (Reboratti 2007), and whose behavior in the *papeleras* conflict, albeit more active than other “institutionalized” environmental groups, has been no exception, shifting from a confrontational stance to supporting negotiation.

The combination of these factors may explain why in Argentina, the first environmental conflict to encourage the formation of an environmental movement did not occur until 2000, when a company tried to construct a high-tension line in the

⁶ It is within this context that the *papeleras* conflict began. The title of Secretary of the Environment continued to have no real meaning until April of 2006, when the national government named a lawyer associated with the ACAG to the post. This act marked the Secretary’s first intervention in the conflict, four years after Uruguay’s announcement that they would be bringing in these plants, though she would announce one year later that she would not continue to intervene in the conflict. Reboratti, C. (2007). *Ambientalismo y conflicto ambiental en el río Uruguay. Del otro lado del río*. V. Palermo and C. Reboratti. Buenos Aires, Edhasa.

Quebrada de Humahuaca with the permission of the government of the Northwestern province of Jujuy. The project would have had a significant impact on the surrounding landscape, and incited a “spontaneous environmental movement” (Reboratti 2006). As a result of the movement, the provincial government decided to back down and the project was never realized. This movement dissolved quickly after reaching its objective, never fomenting a full-fledged environmental movement in Argentina, “because it developed quickly and the ending was acceptable to the environmentalists” (Reboratti 2007). Reboratti notes “the important role that the territorial identity of the participants played” (p. 143), which would prove important among members of the ACAG as well, and would serve as a link between the environmental and nationalist frames of the conflict.

The second major conflict occurred in 2002, when a Canadian mining company announced plans to excavate for gold in the province of Chubut through open-pit mining. Their plan to use cyanide as a separating element to obtain the gold, combined with the large scale of the project, which would have disrupted the mountain scenery of this Patagonian province, generated a massive response from the local population. Considering themselves threatened, they formed a “spontaneous environmental organization” (Reboratti 2007), and began holding demonstrations, making a series of presentations before the provincial justice system, who issued an immediate order to cease mining activity until an in-depth environmental impact study could be carried out. Although neither conflict produced movements that lasted beyond the resolution of the issue at hand, they established a clear precedent for how the ACAG would approach the *papeleras* issue and how the

public would react, as well as give insight into how Argentine society relates to the environment:

Spontaneity and self-generation were important in creating an image of honesty and legitimacy in the eyes of a public who is generally skeptical of political organizations. This movement's methodology was to go through institutional channels while at the same time create a successful public relations campaign. Similar to what happened in the Quebrada case and what would happen in Gualeguaychú, two basic elements appear in the formation of a spontaneous environmental movement: territorial identity and the worth attributed to nature as a scenic resource. (Reboratti 2007).

Past examples of environmental activism in Argentina may be few and far between, but they call attention to some of the most important aspects of the framing processes undertaken by Environmental Assembly of Gualeguaychú: using the culture of doubt and skepticism, in addition to notions of territorial identity, to pull politicians, the media, and public opinion to the side of the locals as opposed to the polluting corporation.

Argentine Nationalism and the Configuration of the “*causa nacional*”

One of the main reasons that the construction of the *papeleras* morphed into such a conflict is that it was framed as a *causa nacional* (national cause), which, in the words of McAdam, is a “highly resonant ideational strain” in Argentine culture. Through a process of frame bridging conducted by the ACAG and in turn the national government, the *papeleras* became inextricably linked to Argentina's tumultuous history with nationalist movements, therefore eliciting an enormous public response.

The initial construction of the *papeleras* as a *causa nacional* is relatively straightforward: because the conflict dealt with another country, it was clear that the

national government would have to intervene, and because “state environmentalism” (Reboratti 2007) was managed not by the virtually meaningless Secretary of the Environment but by default the Department of Foreign Affairs: “the position of the Argentine government changed as the conflict intensified, and abruptly, due to pressure from the ACAG, adopted its position. This originates in a very simple idea: Argentina did not have—and still does not have—an environmental policy with sufficient guidelines for intervening in this conflict” (Reboratti 2007).

The framing processes initiated by the ACAG were extremely important to the construction of the *causa nacional*, which in turn influenced politicians to adopt their discourse. Palermo notes,

National causes are not constructed without the help of thought and rhetoric...In the case of the *papeleras*, the attempt to construct a *causa nacional* was obvious. We know that for the major part of the period between April of 2005 and the end of 2006, the essence is that of an Argentine government that has practically adopted the demands of the activists and has supported, politically and logistically, their methodologies as well, in many cases with an intimidating attitude” (Palermo 2007).

He also points out that the notion of a *causa nacional* worked to win support for the ACAG’s stance on the *papeleras* because within the context of a culture of distrust, it demonstrated a “regenerative potential” that counteracted “the notion of being victimized” by Uruguay.

The idea of losing power to Uruguay is particularly salient in Argentine nationalist discourse, because of what Carlos Escudé calls “Argentine territorial nationalism,” rooted in the “myth of lost territory” (Escudé 1988). This describes the perception that the territory that comprised the colonial Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, which includes Uruguay, Paraguay, and parts of Peru, Bolivia and Chile, should belong to Argentina. Escudé sees the prevalence of this myth, which he

notes is “generalized throughout all sectors of the population,” as the basis for Argentina’s invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982 and subsequent war with Great Britain, as well as the near-war with Chile in 1978 over border disputes in Patagonia. By framing the *papeleras* conflict as a “loss of territory” issue, it has activated deep-seated resentment against Uruguay, because “in a back corner of Argentine political culture exists the belief that Uruguay’s status as an independent state, or sovereign nation, suffers from a deficit...Uruguayans know this position well: ex-president Jorge Batlle warned us, because Argentines still do not recognize, that ‘we are no longer an Argentine province’” (Palermo 2007).

Territorial nationalism is also tied to Argentina’s history of immigration. In “Imagining *la raza argentina*”, Jeane Delaney discusses how Argentine nationalism evolved over the course of the nineteenth century, when Argentina gained independence from Spain, through the start of the twentieth century, when the massive influx of European immigrants that occurred around the turn of the century began to affect ideas about Argentine identity. She argues that since Argentina is a country whose population mainly descends from European immigrants and where indigenous influence is virtually nonexistent, nationalism takes a different shape from many other Latin American countries, which seek unity through ethnicity-related connections. Although there is a strong sense of a “*raza argentina*” (Delaney 2006) or Argentine race, it is thought of less as being rooted in a blood connection as it is about living in the cultural space that is Argentina.

Palermo sees the most important connection between the nationalism surrounding the *papeleras* and Argentina's nationalist history as that between the present *causa nacional* and the *causa de las Malvinas* (cause of the Malvinas):

Throughout the war of 1982, the *causa de las Malvinas* was categorically separated from the conflict itself. The decision to occupy the islands, along with the war itself, was attributed to the military dictatorship, and it was assumed that the *cause* had nothing to do with it, thus preserving the *cause* from the most miserable aspects of the war. A consequence of the categorical separation between cause and war, and the consequent preservation of the cause, was that it made it unnecessary, and eventually impossible, to critically examine the most pernicious characteristics of the *cause*. Because we perceived and experimented with our own aggression in a 'victimized' frame, we were able to attribute it to an act of force that was purely defensive and entirely justified as well as exceptional. The profound relationship between the *cause* and the events of the war were erased from memory, which allowed the 'victimized' notion that had legitimized aggression as defensive, justified, and an exceptional act to remain unchanged. The political-cultural matrix which fed the *causa de las Malvinas* has been reactivated today under the guise of *vecinalismo* ('localism') and environmentalism. (Palermo 2007)

The "categorical" separation between cause and conflict is absolutely evident in the case of the *papeleras*. A quick once-over of the actions taken by the main actors involved demonstrates a clear effort to justify aggressive, seemingly self-destructive behavior towards the construction of the plants. The framing of the *papeleras* as a loss of territory issue brought the "victimized" framework associated with other conflicts into play, as well as the subsequent legitimacy conferred to any and all action that takes place within the framework. The surprisingly fierce denial by the ACAG that any appeal to past ideological frameworks or repertoires of contention has taken place also reflects the general disassociation of cause and conflict, and past and present, that results from the "victimized" framework.

Papeleras: Environmental Movement or Not?

The environmental frame is perhaps the most complicated aspect of the conflict. As has already been made clear, many factors besides the predicted pollution itself were responsible for the massive mobilization surrounding the *papeleras*. In fact, the ACAG's slogan "*No a las papeleras*" (No to the paper plants), the single most important element of their framing process, is seen by nearly every scholar of the conflict as one of the main reasons why it has become so difficult to resolve: "The act of diverting the focus of the problem towards the construction in itself and not the potential effects of their operation, located the conflict in a labyrinth without an apparent exit" (Reboratti 2007). Because the group's stance is so adamantly focused on the construction/no-construction of the plants, any effort that does not adamantly oppose the construction, even those that focus on measures to prevent pollution, are seen as inherently wrong and an attempt to undermine its cause.

Palermo calls this stance "environmental fundamentalism" (Palermo 2007). He describes it as being "technically weak, this fundamentalism alludes to the *perception* of the problem as the makings of an ecological disaster, which becomes a matter of life or death, completely nonnegotiable, over between building the plants or not." (194). The ACAG's framing of the *papeleras* as a life or death situation is very clear: a popular slogan used by the ACAG was "*Si Botnia nace, Gualeguaychú muere*" (If Botnia is born, Gualeguaychú will die). This stance, when adopted by the Argentine government, turned the conflict with Uruguay into a "zero-sum game"

(Palermo 2007): “After the moment in which the (no) construction of the plants transformed itself into the central objective of each of the parties involved, and the axis of discussion, they began to perceive it as a zero-sum dispute: any possible resolution would result in an absolute winner and an undeniable loser” (Aboud and Museri 2007), making a resolution practically impossible.

Palermo explains how this all-or-nothing frame is understandable by considering how it is rooted in the ACAG’s context:

The local Gualeguaychú identity was extremely strong and expressive...and, given its characteristics (connected to nature, the environment, the river, the landscape and the communion of inhabitants with this natural framework), the perceived threat affected the residents of Gualeguaychú essentially in terms of identity, and not so much in terms of interests; it affected a preexisting identity because they *perceived* the ‘threat’ in terms of values associated with identity” (195)

In this view, Gualeguaychú residents mobilized not because they were specifically concerned about the environment, but because they perceived the project as a threat to their local identity, of which nature was an important feature. The strained dichotomy established by Palermo between Gualeguaychú residents’ “identity” and “interests” as an explanation for their actions perhaps reflects a personal bias of the author towards environmental issues in themselves lacking sufficient cause for action, but it also reflects the greater lack of an environmental consciousness of the Argentine people— which was recognized by the ACAG and prompted them to frame the conflict in the way that they did. While politically the all-or-nothing frame may have been disastrous, it is understandable not only in terms of the ACAG’s identity but because, as Vernet points out, pollution of the river was a given and aesthetic harm was certain.

As is evidenced by the history, or lack thereof, of environmentalism in Argentina, an environmental issue in itself was not going to mobilize the public and gain its favor. One of the tactics used by the ACAG was to tie into the culture of distrust: the “spontaneous” nature of the ACAG made it “appear to the rest of the country as a ‘healthy’ movement: horizontal and not politically contaminated, which is likeable in the eyes of a society like Argentina’s, which has lost its faith in the political apparatus” (Reboratti 2007). There was also a concerted effort at frame extension, by framing the issue in terms of the harmful role played by multinational corporations in Latin America. There is a strong tradition of leftist student groups in Argentina who customarily have framed their causes around anti-imperialist rhetoric, and who began to mobilize around the *papeleras* based on this extension of the environmental frame.

This frame extension also clearly impacted politicians, who adopted this rhetoric as part of the “justification” of their aggressive stance. At a European Union/Mercusor summit that took place in Vienna in May 2006, Kirchner dropped his usual nationalist, anti-Uruguay rhetoric in favor of a stance that was critical of the role played by a European corporation in the conflict: “We will not allow developed countries to transfer the most contaminated parts of their industries to us...Just as the countries of the European Union have elaborated their processes for the prevention of cross-border pollution, Latin America has the right to have these norms respected” (La Nación, 2006). This approach has been echoed in recent efforts by the media to find a tone that is less hostile towards Uruguay and that transfers most of the “blame” to Botnia, the Finnish company who constructed the plant.

Accompanying an article about an accident at the plant from the January 31, 2008 issue of the Argentine newspaper *Página/12* was a cartoon featuring a Botnia representative who claims, “Maybe we are contaminating the river a little bit, but we are protecting the region. In the future, when the armies of the great powers go out looking for fresh water, they will not come here” (Paz 2008).

Due to the frequent amplification and extension of the environmental frame that was required to arouse support, it is difficult to definitively call the movement surrounding the *papeleras* conflict an environmental movement, because for most people, it was not.

Conclusions

In her essay “Postmodern Forgetfulness,” Argentine literary and cultural critic Beatriz Sarlo beautifully elaborates the contradictions of Argentine historical memory:

Postmodernity is no stranger to ideas that fail to achieve a concrete life and are always on the verge of vanishing. Certainly we are not now overwhelmed by the weight of history: time goes by quickly, almost unnoticed, devouring the innovations it brings and, at the same time, devoured by them. In this climate the passion for cultural recycling is not surprising: the novelty of the past is nourished by our habit of forgetting. (Sarlo 2002)

The aesthetics of postmodern life are based on disappearance more than on invention. To be precise, modernity had at its center the invention of the new; postmodernity has no center. It flows and carries everything in its current: the past and the future are comfortably interlaced because the past has lost its density and the future has lost its certainty. (p. 554)

When a significant and dense relationship with the past is lost and is converted into a storehouse of entertaining recyclings, the past may come back to haunt us. (p. 555)

In the case of the *papeleras*, the movement initiated by the ACAG utilized Argentine social movement frames of the past, extending them to fit in an environmental context. The group also borrowed from the Argentine repertoire of contention, while explicitly denying it. As Sarlo indicates, this type of cultural appropriation of the past can be dangerous if the process goes without recognition. This is made especially clear in Palermo's argument concerning the connection between the *causa de las Malvinas* and the *causa nacional* of the *papeleras*, in which aggression and hostility are not only justified but go unchecked because the cause has been separated from the conflict, making it impossible to consider critically.

As it stands today, the conflict has the potential to cause significant damage to Argentina's relationship with Uruguay and other countries in the region, and, although it may not be "the death of foreign policy" as Escudé writes, it may affect Argentina's ability to maintain relationships with other countries as well. As initial reactions to new president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's inauguration speech demonstrate, the stance she has inherited from her husband's administration places her in a difficult position in regards to both her government's relationship with Uruguay and its leadership position within Mercosur (Bruschtein 2007). Since the start of her administration, however, dialogue has become significantly more polarized than before. The government alternates between overt hostility towards Uruguay and expressions of almost familial warmth: soon after president Fernández de Kirchner's accusatory inauguration speech, she met with Vazquez in Uruguay and remarked how she "felt at home," to which he responded, "In Uruguay, you are at home. We are so happy that you are here." (Perez de Eulate 2007). Her

administration maintains their commitment to proving that Uruguay violated the Treaty of the River Uruguay in the ICJ, but has not expressed the same level of undaunted support for the ACAG that her husband did. Perhaps this demonstrates an effort on her part to project authority and reclaim the power that has been lost to “popular organizations,” but it also demonstrates that much of the government’s previous focus on the environment in its rhetoric has been lost, and has been replaced by a strictly legal interpretation. This is not a good sign for the future of “state environmentalism” in Argentina.

Most scholars are hesitant to call the movement surrounding the *papeleras* a step toward an authentic Argentine environmental consciousness. Aboud and Museri write,

It is extremely positive that the subject of the need to care for the environment has acquired relevance in the public agenda and Argentine politics. However, since the start of the conflict, the tension between [Argentina and Uruguay] has reached a high level of intensity, bilateral relations have significantly deteriorated, and relationships with other countries in the region have been affected. (Aboud and Museri 2007)

In Palermo’s view, “perhaps the crisis of the *papeleras* marks a before and after in the development of an environmental consciousness in Argentina, but, with things the way they are, this is not necessarily good news” (Palermo 2007).

I agree that it is extremely important that the topic of the environment has finally come into the public discourse, and although I disagree with Palermo’s stance on environmental consciousness, it demonstrates the very precarious position that the topic of the environment has occupied in Argentina. It is impossible to know exactly what connotations the new use of environmental discourse by the government and in the public sphere will take on or accomplish in the future because

the conflict has not been framed overall in terms of actual concern for the environment; framing choices were constrained by Argentina's lack of environmental consciousness; action was limited to the established repertoire of contention; the all-or-nothing frame converted the conflict into a zero-sum game; the *causa nacional* has been separated from the conflict; and because, as Sarlo writes, a "significant and dense relationship with the past is lost."

That is not to discount the profound commitment to the environment that has been exhibited by the ACAG, which, as of February 2008, had continuously blockaded the General San Martín Bridge for fifteen consecutive months. Paper production is inherently polluting, and the residents of Gualeguaychú have every right to defend the health of their city and their river, particularly when it has come under threat by an operation that was constructed under illegal circumstances. For the consciousness they have raised to effect real change, though, may depend more on the mindset of the hot dog vendor who has written their slogan on the side of his cart. Will his cart become a forum for other environmental messages? Will he take a stand against other pulp mills, particularly those in his own country, which seem to have been forgotten throughout the course of this conflict? It seems unlikely, but perhaps the next time I run into him in the Plaza San Martín he will be selling *veggie-panchos* out of a solar-powered cart.

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